

Medieval Law and Order



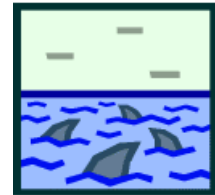
Law and order was very *severe* in Medieval England. It was believed that *people would only learn how to behave properly if they were frightened that something would happen to them if they broke the law.* Even the 'smallest' offences often had serious problems

People who were found guilty had to through three *ordeals* to see if they were guilty:



Ordeal by fire. A person accused of committing a crime held a red hot iron bar and walked three steps. His hand was then bandaged and left for three days. If after three days the hand looked better then the person was innocent, if the wound was not better then they were guilty.

Ordeal by water. An accused person was tied up and thrown into water. If they floated then they were guilty of the crime they committed but if they sank then they were innocent.



Ordeal by combat. This was used by noblemen who had been accused of something. They would fight in combat with the person who accused them. Whoever lost was usually dead at the end of the fight.

King Henry II did not think that the ordeals were a good way to decide if somebody was innocent or guilty. In 1154 he did three things that brought peace to England.

1. *He pulled down illegal castles and brought back the laws of Henry I.*
2. *He got rid of the three ordeals and replaced them with a trial.*
3. *Made judges go around the country and make sure that the law was working.*

If you were found guilty of a crime you would expect a very bad punishment.

- Thieves had their hands cut off.
- Women who committed murder were strangled and burnt.
- People who hunted illegally had their ears cut off.
- Prisons cost money so it was cheaper to execute people.

People were hung on a gibbet. This was a large wooden pole where the bodies would be left to rot for a few weeks so that people would be put off.

TASKS

Put the title ' Medieval Law and Order' in your books.
Copy out the questions and then answer them.

1. Why was law and order **severe** in medieval England?
2. What were the three types of **ordeals**? Explain about each one.
3. Write down three crimes and what the punishment was for each of them.